



## **Retail Food Establishment Power Outage Emergency Response Fact Sheet and Guidance**

A power outage can potentially affect a food establishment in the following ways:

1. Refrigerators will not be functional,
2. Cooking, hot holding, mechanical dishwashing, and equipment that requires power for operation will not be functional,
3. Hot water may not be available,
4. The facility may not have water service if it is supplied by a well with an electric pump.

In most cases of power failure, the food establishment may need to be closed. Operators should close their food establishment immediately if a significant threat or danger to the public's health exists or if food safety can no longer be assured. Still, some facilities may have backup power generation or gas-powered appliances, such as stoves or hot water heaters, and able to continue normal operations.

Facilities trying to remain open may need access to large amounts of ice for cooling foods in order to maintain the required product temperatures. In these circumstances, the facility must implement alternative procedures to continue to meet the requirements of the [2013 ODA Retail Food Code](#). Some facilities may have to be limited to the sale of non-time/ temperature control for safety (TCS) foods. Others may be able to operate, if the following requirements are met.

### **GUIDELINES FOR SALVAGING FOODS**

#### **Refrigerated Foods**

Foods requiring time and temperature for control of safety TCS must be evaluated to determine whether proper storage temperatures can be maintained throughout the outage.

If it is **known** how long the power has been out:

- If the power has been out for less than 4 hours and the power is expected back shortly, then the refrigerator(s) should be kept closed. When the power is restored, the temperature of TCS foods should be taken to ensure that they are at 41°F or below. Foods above 41°F should be cooled down to 41°F or below in ice and then placed back into refrigeration once power has been restored.
- If the power has been out for less than 4 hours and not expected to return shortly, then TCS foods should be kept on ice to keep them cold.
- If the power has been out for more than 4 hours, then food temperatures should be taken. TCS foods requiring temperatures of 41°F or less should be iced immediately!
- Discard TCS foods that have been at temperatures greater than 41°F for over 4 hrs.

If it is **not known** how long the power has been out:

- Temperatures of TCS foods should be taken immediately. Foods with temperatures of 41°F or less should be iced immediately to maintain their required temperatures.
- Consider discarding TCS foods at temperatures greater than 41°F for over four hours.



## **Frozen Foods**

Foods stored in freezers will generally stay frozen or below 41°F for a day or two during a power outage. The actual time the food will remain frozen or cold, however, depends on the size and type of the freezer, the types and amounts of food stored in the unit, the temperature of the frozen food, and whether or not the unit is well insulated.

Fully- or well insulated freezers will keep foods frozen longer than those that are partially full or poorly insulated ones. Also, larger freezers may keep foods frozen longer than smaller units. Meat and poultry should stay frozen longer than baked goods.

Consider moving all frozen foods to a functional freezer, if one is available. Make sure the food is insulated and protected from contamination during transportation. If the food cannot be moved, leave it in the freezer and periodically check that the temperature is still meeting the minimum Food Code requirements. Consider grouping similar types of foods together to try to keep them colder longer. Meat and poultry should be stored below and away from other foods in case they begin to thaw; to prevent cross-contamination from potential dripping juices. If it is available, dry ice can be used in the unit to keep foods cold.

Frozen foods that have been thawed:

- TCS foods that have thawed or are partially thawed need to be checked to see if they are still safe to keep or are able to be re-frozen when power has been restored.
- If the power has been out long enough for foods to thaw, then product temperatures should be taken to ensure that they still meet the minimum Food Code temperature requirements.
- Consider discarding TCS foods that have been at temperatures greater than 41°F for over 4 hours.
- TCS foods at 41°F or less should be iced and maintained at that temperature until power is restored.

Care should be taken not to indiscriminately discard frozen foods without a careful evaluation as some foods such as frozen juices are frozen for convenience (i.e. frozen juices).

## **Hot Foods**

TCS foods, which are being cooked or that are in a hot holding device when the power goes out should be immediately cooled in an ice bath to 41°F or below, and kept iced until the power is restored then placed under refrigeration. TCS foods shall be cooled within 2 hours from (135°F) to (70°F); and within a total of 6 hours from 57°C (135°F) to 5°C (41°F) or less. If there is not enough ice to cool hot foods to 41°F or the food is unable to cool quickly enough to meet Food Code time/temperature requirements, then they should be discarded after being out of temperature for longer than 4 hours. Keeping temperature log sheets for hot foods, which may get out of temperature for longer than 4 hours, will help determine when they need to be discarded. There may be instances when a facility that has gas appliances, which can keep hot foods hot in ovens or other hot holding devices; assuming they are still functional.

Prior to discarding all foods, a store should consider what evidence must be retained for insurance loss claims. If you have any questions regarding how to keep TCS foods safely at the required temperature during a power outage, contact your local food safety inspector: <https://oda.direct/FindFoodInspector>